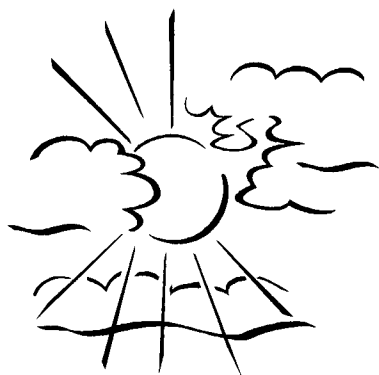


***Department
of
Human
Services***

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394



*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Wednesday, February 8[, 2006

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

TOPIC	PAGE
*Federal Budget	2-4
Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	5-12
*Background Checks	13-18
Vulnerable Adults	19-24
Domestic Violence	25-26
Health Care	27-28
Evacuees/Refugees	29-31
Heating Assistance	32
Caseload	33
Appointments	34
Miscellaneous	35

Wednesday, February 08, 2006

Federal red ink shrinks money for states

By Kathleen Hunter, Stateline.org Staff Writer

President Bush is offering states no help in paying for congressionally ordered changes to driver's licenses and would foist new costs on states to provide food for low-income pregnant women while slashing money to revitalize poor neighborhoods.

One day after Bush released his \$2.77 trillion proposed 2007 budget, analysts scouring the document concluded that while it is chock full of savings for the federal government, it could spell new financial responsibilities for states.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington, D.C., group that focuses on policies affecting the poor, estimated in a Feb. 7 report that Bush's proposal would curtail \$6.7 billion in state and local grants next year.

"This budget continues to chip away at the states' ability to provide services," said Iris Lav, the Center's deputy director.

As part of Bush's campaign to halve the federal deficit -- expected to reach an all-time high of \$423 billion this year -- by 2009, he has proposed squeezing savings from an array of domestic spending programs, while boosting funding for homeland security and national defense.

Less money would flow to states to help the poor under Bush's budget, the Center concludes.

The president proposed to nix the HOPE VI grant program that funds the demolition and redevelopment of public housing units and to decrease by nearly one-third Community Development Block Grants, which aim to revitalize poor neighborhoods. The proposed budget also would zero out a Centers for Disease Control grant to states that funds preventative health care for the needy as well as the Community Supplemental Food Program that pays for food for 40,000 low-income elderly people a year.

If adopted by Congress, the budget proposal also would take a toll on federal support for law enforcement. Funding for drug-free schools would be eliminated, and money for community policing would be significantly slashed.

In addition to eliminating or reducing several key state grant programs, Bush's proposal also would saddle states with additional unfunded mandates, said Michael Bird, senior federal affairs counsel for the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL).

For example, the budget proposal would create a new requirement that states match a portion of the federal funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which assists 7.5 million low-income pregnant women and children up to age 5. According to NCSL, the plan doesn't offer any aid to states to help them comply with the federal REAL ID Act, which requires states in two years to revamp how they issue driver's licenses to apply strict new national standards passed by Congress in May 2005.

Although efforts to crack down on illegal immigration are gaining momentum across the country, Bush's budget would do away with reimbursements to state and local governments for jailing illegal immigrants.

Detaining illegal immigrants already is creating huge budget problems in Arizona. In 2004, the state spent \$77 million incarcerating more than 4,000 illegal immigrants.

NCSL estimates that states already face \$31 billion in cost shifts from Washington, D.C.

On the heels of a five-year \$6.9 billion reduction in Medicaid spending approved by Congress last week (Feb. 1), Bush proposed a second round of cuts to expensive entitlement programs that provide assistance to the poor, elderly and disabled.

The administration's effort to curb the growth of entitlements over the next five years includes \$13.6 billion in savings from the state-federal Medicaid program for 53 million poor and disabled Americans and a \$36 billion reduction in Medicare, the federally funded health care program for the elderly.

Advocates for the poor are concerned the proposed entitlement reductions could poke holes in the nation's safety net, and states are worried they will be forced to pick up the slack in the absence of federal funding.

The good news for states is that many of the items in the administration's budget plan that give states heartburn have been proposed before and rejected by Congress. For example, Congress previously has rejected Bush's proposal to consolidate several economic and community development programs.

"These are old, tired ideas. Nothing new," said Bird, of NCSL.

Lawmakers could have even less appetite this year for tough spending cuts with midterm elections in November.

Some elements of Bush's budget proposal that could impact states include:

- **Streamlining government** - The administration hopes to squeeze \$15 billion in savings by consolidating or eliminating 141 federal programs. More than one-fifth of those cuts -- \$ 3.5 billion -- are in education, including money for the arts, student loans, early education and adult literacy. Congress cut or eliminated 89 of the 154 programs Bush targeted for savings last year, and several of the survivors -- such as loans for low-income college students -- are back in the crosshairs this year.
- **Tax cuts** - Bush has called again for Congress to make permanent the income tax cuts passed in 2001 and 2003 and is proposing a range of additional cuts and tax breaks. Federal tax reductions could impact states because states often piggyback off the federal tax system.
- **National Guard** - The administration backtracked from earlier plans to cut the Army National Guard and will fund the citizen-soldier force to the tune of 350,000 members. Last week, word leaked that the administration planned to keep the Army National Guard at its current level of about 333,000 members, rather than budget for a full force of 350,000. A coalition of governors and U.S. senators quickly rallied against the change and convinced the military to alter its plans.
- **Medicaid** - Besides cuts, Bush's spending plan includes \$100 million annually to fund a new program called Cover the Kids that is designed to boost enrollment for children in Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which covers 6.1 million low-income children who don't qualify for Medicaid. It also would change arcane rules governing the flow of Medicaid money between Washington, D.C., and state capitols to keep states from using accounting ploys to get larger shares of federal matching funds.
- **Education** - The overall federal education budget would be cut by \$3.1 billion or 5.5 percent from 2006 levels by eliminating 42 education programs. The president also wants to launch new initiatives to strengthen math and science achievement and reform America's high schools. (

- **Homeland Security** - The administration proposed cutting homeland security grants to cities and states by about \$400 million, to about \$2.57 billion. As part of these cuts, the agency would redirect money to grants that focus more on risk, rather than a high flat rate for every state. Programs for firefighters and police terrorism prevention would be eliminated or reduced. Also, starting in 2007, states must coordinate their emergency communications with the federal government to receive homeland security grants.
- **Illegal Immigration** - Funding would increase for programs aimed at illegal immigration including: a research service that tracks down citizenship inquiries for state and local authorities and a partnership that trains law enforcement officials in immigration law. In a boon to Southwestern states, the Border Patrol would add 1,500 new agents.
- **Energy** - With heating and electricity prices soaring, the federal budget proposal would cut \$91 million from state grants to help low-income citizens make their homes more energy-efficient -- a 29 percent reduction. Research into some new energy technologies is one of the few winners this year, with a proposed increase of \$66 million more for solar energy technology, \$41 million to develop hydrogen fuel and fuel cells, and \$29 million for biofuel research. Other technologies did not fare so well: \$23 million to improve geothermal energy would be eliminated along with \$1 million for hydropower.
- **Environment** - State-run environmental programs would be cut by a total \$416 million, including a proposed \$199 million reduction in money for building sewage and water treatment plants and \$35 million less for clean-air programs, said Steve Brown, executive director of the Environmental Council of the States.
- **Transportation** - States would not see their road and bridge building money cut under the president's budget. Funds for highway building, which come from federal gasoline taxes collected in the states, would rise 9.6 percent to \$39.9 billion, according to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. However, the proposed budget would reduce funding for Amtrak by \$394 million and eliminate a \$287 million program that lends money for rail improvements.
- **Toll roads** - The president's budget proposed a \$100 million pilot program for five states to study new ways to pay for future transportation projects, especially through tolls. The program is necessary because of predictions that federal gasoline taxes that are used to pay for road and bridge projects will not keep pace with needs, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation.

•
Staff Writers Mark K. Matthews, Eric Kelderman, Kavan Peterson and Daniel C. Vock contributed to this report.

Published February 8, 2006

Parents charged with killing Ricky Both face charges of open murder

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

MASON - How and when Ricky Holland died still is undecided, but prosecutors Tuesday charged his parents, Tim and Lisa Holland, with open murder.

The Hollands - shackled and wearing yellow jumpsuits during arraignments before 55th District Court Judge Thomas Boyd - face life in prison if convicted. They remain in Ingham County Jail without bond.

Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III said the final decision to file murder charges against the Hollands "reached critical mass over the weekend," although he had been considering it for more than a week. He would not elaborate on the evidence against the couple.

A charge of open murder means that the jury would decide whether the crime was first-degree murder or second-degree.

Ingham County Medical Examiner Dr. Dean Sienko said he has not yet determined a cause of death but that he is treating the case as a homicide.

"We're not going to rush this," he said. "We're going to exhaust all the evidence we have to make the most accurate call on the cause of death."

Sienko said several experts are working on the case, including a forensic entomologist, who can determine whether the body was moved based on the insects found in and around the body.

In asking the judge to deny bond on Tuesday, Dunnings said Lisa Holland provided "facts that led police in the wrong direction, trying to cover up the crime."

Regarding Tim Holland's bond, Dunnings later said, "He is charged with murder - a heinous crime - and does present a threat to the community."

Preliminary hearings, which will determine if there is enough evidence to go to trial, are set for 10 a.m. Feb. 16 for both the Hollands.

Left court sobbing

Tim Holland was sobbing as he was led out of the courtroom.

"He's devastated with the entire situation," said his attorney, Frank Reynolds, who was retained last week. Reynolds said his client is innocent.

Lisa Holland's attorney, Mike Nichols, said in court that the evidence presented to support the warrant for open murder was "not insurmountable" and was not enough to deny bond for his client.

"She is innocent in the eyes of our system," he said. "That's the only way we can look at her at this point."

Proceedings closed

Before the Hollands were arraigned, Boyd granted a prosecution request to close the courtroom to the public and media while police gave testimony establishing reasons for the open murder charges.

Boyd said the Hollands' rights to a fair trial could be compromised if the information became public.

After the hearing, Ingham County sheriff's officials said they were satisfied that the thousands of hours they and several other agencies spent working the case had produced results.

"We were doing this for Ricky all along," Detective Lt. Jeff Joy said. "It's come to a good resolution."

Sheriff Gene Wriggelsworth added: "This is just one step. We've still got a ways to go."

Also Tuesday, prosecutors said they were dropping obstruction of justice charges against both Tim and Lisa Holland. Those charges were filed last month when the Hollands were first arrested in connection with their son's disappearance.

Ricky Holland was 7 years old when he was reported missing July 2, 2005, kicking off a massive search effort. His remains were found Jan. 27 after Tim Holland led police to a remote area in Bunker Hill Township.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

What's next

- Preliminary hearings for Tim and Lisa Holland are set for 10 a.m. Feb. 16 in 55th District Court in Mason. They were charged Tuesday with open murder in the death of their 7-year-old adopted son, Ricky.

Wednesday, February 08, 2006

Parents charged in death Murder counts filed; disappearance of 7-year-old near Lansing prompted massive hunt.

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

MASON -- The adoptive parents of 7-year-old Ricky Holland of Williamston were charged Tuesday with murdering the child, whose disappearance eight months ago spurred a massive 10-day search by hundreds of police and volunteers.

Tim Holland, 36, and his wife, Lisa Holland, 34, were arraigned separately by 55th District Judge Thomas Boyd. Both were denied bond.

Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III said probable cause was established on the basis of nearly 1,000 pages of evidence, as well as verbal information provided by Ingham County Medical Examiner Dean Sienko.

Boyd issued a gag order suppressing evidence presented by prosecutors on the murder warrant, so details about what led to the murder charges remain unclear.

The order will remain in effect through the preliminary examination, which was scheduled for 10 a.m. Feb. 16.

"One of the reasons I made the motion (to suppress) was to make sure they could get a fair and impartial hearing in Ingham County," Dunnings said.

Prosecutors say the two murdered Ricky on July 1. He was reported missing July 2.

Police and volunteers searched roadways, farm fields, lakes, ponds and rivers up to five miles from his home, about 15 miles from Lansing. Helicopters, dive teams and K-9 units assisted in the search.

Ricky's body was found in remote Ingham County on Jan. 27. Ingham County sheriff's detectives say they were led to the remains by Tim Holland, but officials said each parent has implicated the other in his death. Officials have not released the cause of death.

Tim Holland's defense attorney, Frank Reynolds, said Tuesday his client is innocent.

"He's devastated with the entire situation," Reynolds said. "We maintain his innocence."

Michael Nichols, Lisa Holland's attorney, said he hopes people withhold judgment of his client until the evidence is presented at trial.

"Lisa doesn't have to prove anything. It's entirely up to the government to prove their case beyond a reasonable doubt," Nichols said.

You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or kbouffard@detnews.com.

Tuesday, February 07, 2006

14-year-old girl found, Amber Alert cancelled

Jon Zemke / Special to detnews.com

An Amber Alert for a 14-year-old Battle Creek girl has been called off after the man suspected of abducting her turned himself in to police in Detroit this morning, according to Michigan State Police Detroit Post.

The girl is safe.

Police said the man took the girl from her home in Battle Creek at 1:30 a.m. and started to head to Detroit. He surrendered to the Detroit Police Department around 6 a.m.

Jon Zemke is a Metro Detroit freelance writer.

Questions Surrounding Amber Alert

By Peggy Agar

Web produced by Christine Lasek

February 7, 2006

An Amber Alert scare that started across the state ended in Detroit Tuesday, and 7 Action News played a part in bringing the missing girl to safety.

James Shelton is at the center of a statewide Amber Alert. He is accused of beating a Battle Creek man and kidnapping his 14-year-old daughter, Ebony.

Daniel Richards is Ebony's stepfather. He told 7 Action News, "I want him [Shelton] locked up. I'm gonna see to it that he get locked up. In fact, if they don't lock him up, then the worse will happen."

Shelton called the 7 Action News station early Tuesday morning, saying that he was just protecting the girl from an abusive parent. 7 Action News told Shelton to turn himself in to the Detroit Police Department Eastern District, which he did.

Now, Ebony's mother and stepfather tell 7 Action News that James Shelton's story doesn't add up.

"Well, why didn't he call the police?" Daniel Richards asked. "If you're trying to protect her, why didn't you call the police in Battle Creek, and have them go over there and see? He's got a serious problem with molesting kids, that's the way I look at it."

The Richards told 7 Action News that this isn't the first time 50-year-old James Shelton has been with their 14-year-old daughter. They say they tried threatening him, they moved Ebony to her dad's house in Battle Creek to get her away from Shelton, and they've even filed police reports.

None of these measures, however, have worked.

"They ain't never did anything. They told us, 'When you find out, you know, let us know this and let us know that.' What are we supposed to do, you know what I'm saying? We ain't the police."

No charges brought in boy's drowning

Wednesday, February 08, 2006

The Grand Rapids Press

GRANDVILLE -- After more than two months of investigation, the Kent County Prosecutor's Office won't bring criminal charges in the bathtub drowning of a 4-year-old Grandville boy.

Kyle Payton was found floating in the bathtub Nov. 28 by his mother, Julie Payton-Vest.

Payton-Vest, 32, told Grandville Police she was on the phone about five minutes with a friend when she checked on her son and found him unconscious.

She grabbed him and carried him, naked and wet, into the hallway of the Wimbledon Apartments where neighbors heard her screaming and calling for help.

"We all believed it was a tragedy, but an accident. It wasn't something in our mind that rose to a level of crime," said Kent County Prosecutor William Forsyth.

Forsyth noted the child had reached an age where he didn't require constant parental supervision.

The prosecutor said there was no indication of suspicious activity.

"He had a history of seizures with fevers or high temperatures," Forsyth said.

"There was some indication that he had a fever. Whether he had a seizure, we'll never know.

"Regrettably, she should have in retrospect kept a closer eye on her son. A lot of tragedies don't end with criminal charges."

The boy's grandmother declined comment on how the mother was doing.

"It's taken a long time. That's all I can say," she said.

Drowning victim's brother returned to parents

FLUSHING TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION
Wednesday, February 08, 2006

By Ron Fonger
rfonger@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6317

FLUSHING TWP - An opinion from the Oakland County medical examiner trumped one from Hurley Medical Center on Tuesday, so a 3-year-old boy has been returned to his parents for good.

Genesee Circuit Judge John A. Gadola permanently returned the son of Steven and Kristy Vamos after a brief hearing Tuesday, five months after his younger sister drowned in the family swimming pool on W. Carpenter Road. The boy actually went home in December, but Gadola had kept the case open, demanding an explanation from Hurley for why doctors initially said they found evidence Jamie M. Vamos had been molested when they examined her body after the Sept. 1 drowning.

That doctors' report fueled a court petition by the Department of Human Services to take the boy from the couple.

The judge said Tuesday that he had the answers he needed from the hospital and said the system ultimately worked.

"I'm confident Hurley hospital did what it needed to do" based on the information it had at the time, Gadola said.

A DHS report said Hurley doctors found severe rectal and vaginal bruising and lacerations when Jamie was examined.

The Oakland County medical examiner's report concluded there was "no physical evidence found to substantiate the allegation of sexual abuse of this child."

Oakland officials speculated in their report that the blood on Jamie likely came from multiple needle punctures of the right and left groin areas -final efforts to resuscitate her.

Assistant Prosecutor Jay Snodgrass said he agreed with the Oakland officials, noting that the office had more time and more specialized equipment than the emergency room doctors to reach its conclusion.

Neither Snodgrass nor an attorney appointed to represent the Vamoses' son objected to dismissing the petition that had taken the boy from them. DHS representatives also did not object.

Kristy Vamos thanked friends and family members after the decision, saying they stood behind her and her husband when accusations were flying.

"I just don't think there was enough expertise" at Hurley, she said.

QUICK TAKE

Events in the case
SEPT. 1, 2005: 20-month-old Jamie Vamos dies after falling into a family pool on W.

Carpenter Road in Flushing Township.

SEPT. 2, 2005:

After a Genesee County Sheriff's Department

investigator and Hurley Medical Center doctor

suggest Jamie may have been sexually abused before she died, a Department of Human Services caseworker

petitions to take her brother from his parents. The

petition is granted.

Dec. 20, 2005:

Circuit Judge John

A. Gadola returns

the Vamoses' son to them after the

Oakland County

medical examiner concludes there was

"no physical evidence found to substantiate the

allegation of sexual abuse of this child (Jamie)."

FEB. 7: Gadola dismisses the abuse and neglect case

against the Vamoses.

Hospital spokesman Larry Daly said emergency room doctors had a duty to report what they saw and what may have occurred, even if their initial suspicions didn't hold up.

"There is limited time and equipment ... but that is something they have responsibility to check," Daly said of Hurley doctors.

Vamos family members also criticized the Genesee County Sheriff's Department, claiming it helped steer the investigation toward sexual abuse but never apologized for having been wrong.

"They were not minor accusations," Steven Vamos said.

The Flint Journal could not reach Flushing Township Police Chief Douglas Kennedy, whose agency conducted a separate criminal investigation into Jamie's death. for comment Tuesday.

Wednesday, February 08, 2006

Teachers oppose crime checks Education union wants state to void offenders list, saying many employees are named in error.

Marisa Schultz and Christine MacDonald / The Detroit News

The state's largest teachers union called on lawmakers Tuesday to void the results of the Michigan State Police's criminal background check of 200,000 school employees because it believes they are "rife with errors."

The recent background check revealed more than 4,600 criminal offenses, of which 2,200 were felonies, including murder, sex crimes and kidnapping.

However, the Michigan Education Association believes many of the employees listed are listed in error.

As a result of this criminal history check -- which is required twice a year under new state laws that took effect Jan. 1 -- school districts were alerted last week about whether any of their employees had been convicted of crimes.

Salvatore Orlando, an Oak Park High School teacher, says his record shows he has a cocaine conviction, which he says is incorrect. Now he has to pay \$70 for fingerprints to clear his name.

"I'm frustrated because I spent the last two days trying to get to a state police post (to prove my innocence)," said Orlando, who has a clean record according to a check by The Detroit News. "It's very aggravating because I know I didn't do this."

The state "has demonstrated gross negligence in releasing to school districts a list of school employees with criminal convictions that is, by its own admission, rife with errors," Lu Battaglieri, president of the 160,000-member MEA, said in a statement.

The union wants the background checks to be conducted again -- this time with better technology to ensure accuracy.

Martin Ackley, spokesman for the Michigan Department of Education, said officials realize there may be errors, but the first priority is to remove dangerous employees from schools.

He said the department envisioned districts acting as another filter for mistakes.

The MEA called on Speaker of the House Craig DeRoche, R-Novi, to introduce legislation to void the list of convictions.

DeRoche, who believes the focus should be on what is accurate in the report, has supported the release of all the criminal history results, saying parents have a right to know whether felons work near their children. Currently, a court order is barring their full release.

DeRoche is concerned about any inaccuracies, but a "greater concern is not getting these correct (names) to school districts so they can take action," said Matt Resch, the spokesman for DeRoche.

Tom White, executive director of the Michigan School Business Officials, said more than 40 school districts he's aware of believe their lists have errors affecting more than 100 employees. Michigan has about 780 public school districts. The accuracy controversy is over the method in which the state police conducted the check. Fingerprint checks are considered most complete,

but until all school employees are fingerprinted in 2008, the state has to rely on name checks, which can produce "false positives."

State police ran school personnel information through its database of known criminals. Once one identifying characteristic has been matched the database produces a hit, said Shanon Akans, spokeswoman for the state police. The state police has recommended school districts double check the matches using ICHAT, the police's Internet Criminal History Access Tool. ICHAT has filters that can weed out some of the false positives, Akans said. But it can only search one name at a time, she said.

You can reach Marisa Schultz at (313) 222-2310 or mschultz@detnews.com.

What's next

An Ingham County judge Friday is expected to determine if the temporary ban on releasing criminal history data will continue.

Legislation is pending to make the criminal history data public.

Schools wary of felon list

Tuesday, February 07, 2006

JEREMIAH STETTLER
THE SAGINAW NEWS

If Michigan had a school employee felon reporting system in 1999, Alvin E. Level may not have gotten a job in the River Rouge School District.

In the case of Level, who left the Buena Vista School District for River Rouge after his conviction for embezzlement and welfare fraud, the state's new felon reporting law may have proven a success.

However, superintendents across mid-Michigan today are questioning the accuracy of the law's initial list that reveals more than 2,200 felons among Michigan's 200,000 school employees.

The state made the criminal histories available to districts last week.

Superintendent Richard J. Syrek of the Swan Valley School District didn't find any felons in his schools, but he did spot an erroneous misdemeanor conviction listed for one employee.

Although the report was well-intentioned, he said it has caused more trouble than good.

"We want our kids to be safe," Syrek said. "We don't want people who are child molesters in our schools. If we can find a way to keep that from happening, that's fine. I don't have a problem doing it.

"But we are already going to get everyone's fingerprints over the next few years. That is going to be much more reliable information than what we are now getting."

Instead, Syrek said the state has released a flawed report that has misidentified some teachers as felons.

"People are being accused of things they haven't done," he said.

Syrek said the state will have a more accurate accounting of its teachers' backgrounds in 2008, when districts are to complete the fingerprinting all employees.

No felons here

Like the Swan Valley schools, records listed no felons working in the Carrollton Public Schools, Chesaning Union Schools, Hemlock Public School District or St. Charles Community Schools, officials at each said.

"Obviously, we felt very good about that," said Hemlock Superintendent Rudy Godefroidt.

Chesaning Superintendent Kathy L. Stewart said she nevertheless is upset about how the state handled the transfer of such sensitive information.

"I was very concerned about the way the letter came to us," Stewart said. "The envelope was not marked 'confidential.' With information like that, more care should have been used in sending it out."

In Carrollton, two of the district's about 300 staff members have misdemeanors on their records that "happened well over a decade ago," said Superintendent Craig C. Douglas.

"The intent of the law is right on target," he said. "We're all in favor of safety for kids."

Douglas said the district is trying to work with the state to inform the public.

"We're trying to do the right thing and let people know there are no felons, no high abusers," he said.

The information St. Charles received puzzled Superintendent Michael L. Wallace.

"We got the list and ... some of the people don't even work for us anymore," Wallace said.

"We're trying to verify the list and verify the accuracy of the list. We're not releasing anything until we know that what we have is accurate because we're finding out that across the state, there are a lot of inaccuracies."

Wallace said St. Charles has no felons in its employment at this time.

"Absolutely not," he said. "We have no felons currently employed. We have a number of names we feel are inaccurate, and we don't know why they'd be on our list."

Doing their own checking

Saginaw School District administrators today were to review the letter they received with the Monday afternoon mail.

"Our first step is to go through each name individually and do our own check to verify that the information is correct," said Michael B. Manley, district spokesman. "I don't know how many people, if any, are on the list."

Attorneys for the Frankenmuth School District have advised Superintendent Michael Murphy to not release information.

"There are some concerns about accuracy," Murphy said.

Buena Vista School District Board of Education President Alvin Jernigan Jr. said his district is waiting for a corrected list before officials decide the next step.

"We aren't even dealing with that right now. You can't tell about people when you aren't even sure," Jernigan said. "I haven't seen the list. I just know that's the word out."

Awaiting word

The Merrill Community School District had not received the document as of Monday night.

Officials have not made plans to release names but will decide once they see the list.

"It could be that it won't be an issue," said Superintendent John M. Searles.

Searles heard of at least two cases of "false alarms" because state officials cross-referenced individuals' birthdays for the primary list, not Social Security numbers or fingerprints.

In Freeland Community Schools, Superintendent Allen B. Veenkant said the report looked "thin" but he had not had time to review it.

The Saginaw News could not immediately reach officials at the Birch Run Area Schools, Bridgeport-Spaulding Community Schools or Saginaw Township Community Schools.

School-worker crime list flawed MEA, Oakland districts cry foul

Web-posted Feb 8, 2006

By DAVE GROVES
Of The Oakland Press

Oakland County school administrators are clamoring to protect the reputations of what could be scores of school employees falsely identified as convicted criminals.

At the same time, the Michigan Education Association is railing against the Michigan Department of Education for distributing flawed information leading to the confusion.

"The state has demonstrated gross negligence in releasing to school districts a list of school employees with criminal convictions that is, by its own admission, rife with errors," said MEA President Lu Battaglieri.

Here in Oakland County, for example, one Bloomfield Hills school employee was cited with a criminal sexual conduct conviction that, according to the recently enacted Michigan School Safety initiative, would be grounds for mandatory termination.

District Superintendent Steve Gaynor said that is not likely to happen, however.

"According to the records, that person would have been 4 years old at the time the crime was committed," he said.

Huron Valley Superintendent Bob O'Brien said 15 of 19 records his district received were inaccurate. Some were related to people who have not been employed with the district for several years.

"Nothing on the list we received would cause me to raise an eyebrow over student safety concerns," O'Brien said.

He added, however, "Some of the errors I'm hearing about from other places are egregious. There are some terrible things being said about people that are just plain wrong."

Local teachers also are expressing dismay.

"The inaccuracy of the list is just intolerable," said Karl Bell, director of the MEA's North Oakland Association, which represents Clarkston and Holly employees.

"They're also very skeptical because of the politics behind this."

State and local educators are upset that greater efforts were not made to ensure accuracy of the information, given that use of a Michigan State Police criminal history database could have eliminated many erroneous records. Further, local districts were not given an opportunity to review the state's information before the lists were released.

"So far we haven't found one record that's accurate," said Jim Geisler, superintendent of Walled Lake schools.

"They need to get it right so this (safety initiative) doesn't lose credibility. You can't act rashly when you're dealing with people's reputations."

A common fear in the public school community is that names on district lists will be made available to the media and the public regardless of whether the information is accurate.

The MEA last week won an injunction keeping the Michigan Department of Education from releasing blanket records, but some media outlets are working around that by seeking the information from local districts.

Meanwhile, the state House is considering legislation that would force districts and or the state to release the lists.

Brian Whiston, director of legislative affairs for Oakland Schools, said he and other Oakland County educators do not take issue with releasing accurate information, but do not want the reputations of valuable and upstanding school employees being unfairly destroyed.

"We're going to do all we can to stop the release of inaccurate records," Whiston said. "Why should people have their names put on the front page of a newspaper if they haven't committed a crime?"

Man Dies Outside Home in Farmington Hills

By Val Clark

Web produced by Sarah Morgan

February 7, 2006

Farmington Hills police investigated the death of a 68-year-old man who was found outside his home Tuesday morning.

Around 9:30 a.m., maintenance workers discovered the man outside the Baptist Manor, an assisted living facility.

According to police, the man had an argument with his wife and left. It appears he froze to death just outside the door, but they are not ruling out foul play.

Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer said, "We're in the initial stages of a death investigation. We're not ruling out that maybe he possibly fell, slipped, maybe froze to death. But until the medical examiner arrives and our detectives work further as far as interviewing people and the widow. It's sad if he did slip and fall and froze to death last night. It's very uncommon for this to happen."

Editorial

Proper eyes on adult-family homes

When a death occurs at an adult-family home, a police investigation to rule out abuse or neglect is an appropriate move since these facilities tend to be isolated and hidden from public scrutiny. Adult-family homes in Seattle have little to fear from a collaboration between the King County medical examiner and law enforcement. In the best of circumstances, the extra pairs of trained eyes will confirm a facility is following proper health-care procedures. In a worst-case scenario, the proper spotlight is shined on a facility in need of attention. Either way, vulnerable residents are served.

These homes are not being singled out unfairly; they are finally getting the attention they deserve. A rash of cases involving untrained staff and horrifying accidents led to calls for sharper scrutiny.

These facilities, which can house up to six residents, have long flown beneath the radar with relatively little scrutiny from regulators and the public. They operate within private homes and, from the outside, look like any other house in the neighborhood.

They are licensed by the Department of Social and Health Services and inspected every 18 months.

Contrast this with larger facilities such as nursing homes, which are inspected more frequently. Nursing homes have more traffic flowing through, from visitors to physicians to delivery people, all of whom can provide a watchful eye.

In addition, trained volunteers provide on-site checks of 80 percent of the state's nursing homes, but can access only 24 percent of adult-family homes.

Lawmakers ought to consider duplicating Seattle's efforts to include all adult-family homes in the state. The estimated 11,000 residents living in these facilities would likely welcome an extra inspection on their behalf.

And a request by the state's long-term-care ombudsman for \$500,000 to recruit and train 100 additional adult-home volunteers ought to be strongly considered. This ounce of prevention could help forestall incidents that require the attention of medical examiners and the police.

Copyright © 2006 The Seattle Times Company

Column: State scrambling to build direct-care work force

Wednesday, February 08, 2006

By Sharon Emery

If you're a baby boomer, you may already have endured the maelstrom involved in finding care for an ailing parent. You know that direct-care workers who meet your standards are often hard to come by.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm's Medicaid Long-Term Care Task Force highlighted the problem last spring in its final report. Recommendation No. 8: Build and sustain a competent, highly valued, competitively compensated and knowledgeable long-term care work force.

Indications are that making that happen won't be easy.

The administration's proposed update of licensing rules governing 5,000 adult foster care (AFC) and homes for the aged (HFA) facilities is under attack for what assisted-living providers call a pro-union agenda focused on administration rather than care. They've formed the Coalition for Affordable & Quality Care to fight the plan and have been lobbying opinion-makers across the state.

The facilities care for some 48,000 older and disabled Michigan residents, most in homes with 20 or fewer residents.

The proposed rules require licensed facilities to have a health and safety committee to review concerns at the facility and require homes to regularly report employee Social Security numbers, staffing ratios and wage and benefit levels to a statewide information clearinghouse.

Opponents say the rules invade worker privacy and essentially give the state authority to set pay and benefit levels. And in what providers consider an insulting blow, homes with union contracts are exempt from the reporting requirements.

Republican lawmakers are bristling that the Democratic Granholm administration is using the rules to enact policy the Legislature would never approve. Bills that would negate the proposed rules were passed out of the Senate Family and Human Services Committee Tuesday. Chairman Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood, noted that it's "not the government's place to favor or punish" licensees on the basis of collective bargaining agreements.

Jim Gale from the Department of Human Services reassured the packed committee room that the state was "still in the early stages of rule making," and that it was reconvening a work group to try to reach consensus.

Union representatives, whom DHS says joined patient advocates, workers and providers in the work group last summer, say the reporting rules are meant to provide a worker wage structure and a registry to connect workers and employers. They insist the rules will help build the work force and so oppose the Senate legislation.

A 2003 study by Hollis Turnham and Steven Dawson for the nonprofit Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute, which advocates for workers, found that direct-care jobs in Michigan are not competitive with other entry-level jobs in terms of wages, benefits and working conditions. The work is so physically and emotionally challenging that chronic job vacancies and high turnover result.

"The state's average wage for all direct-care workers, \$9.27 an hour, qualifies a full-time worker with two children to receive food stamps," the study found, "... (and many) are not offered or cannot afford offered health care coverage; ironically, these workers provide health care services that they and their children cannot expect to receive."

Whether that's the state's problem is at the center of the debate.

Rule opponents say the local marketplace requires that providers pay their workers appropriately and offer competent care; otherwise, they fail.

Unions argue that low wages and high turnover mean the quality of care suffers and that the state has a responsibility to remedy the situation.

How the current uproar is resolved will signal how Michigan plans to build that competent, compassionate work force that we all may end up needing.

Michigan Report

February 7, 2006

SENATE PANEL OKS BAN ON NURSING HOME/UNION RULES

A series of four bills that would block the state from enacting any rules that would add regulatory requirements on nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and foster care facilities that do not have collective bargaining agreements were reported to the full Senate on Tuesday by the Families and Human Services Committee.

The committee split 3-1-1 on SB 1026, SB 1027, SB 1028 and SB 1029, with Sen. Irma Clark-Coleman (D-Detroit) voting against the bills; Sen. Gilda Jacobs (D-Huntington Woods) passed on the bills.

The bills specifically outlaw the state from establishing rules that set licensure guidelines that would provide preference to facilities with collective bargaining agreements.

Representatives of a number of groups said the prospective rules, which the state began work on last year, would essentially mean that any facilities that do not have labor agreements would have undergo more rules.

“The rules will require more administration and more reporting requirements resulting in added costs,” said David LaLumia of the Michigan Association of Community Mental Health Boards. Those additional costs would come with no promise of additional monies, he said.

And Dean Solden of the Michigan Council on Assisted Living said the rules would mean Michigan would be the most highly regulated state for assisted living facilities.

But Rodger Webb of the Michigan Council of the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees called the bills anti-labor. There are some 27 nursing homes and assisted living facilities that the union has organized and virtually all of them have resisted negotiating a contract, he said.

The bills are not labor neutral, he said. “They send a message to employers that they can violate the (National Labor Relations Act) any time they choose,” Mr. Webb said.

Michigan Report

February 7, 2006

SIKKEMA WARNS AGAINST RISE IN MEDICAID FUNDING

The growth of Medicaid funding in the state is threatening Michigan's future because it forces cuts in spending on higher education and other programs.

An analysis from the Senate Fiscal Agency indicates that spending on Medicaid has increased by 45 percent over the last five years – a time frame that corresponds with the state's economic problems – while spending on corrections has increased by 11 percent.

Meanwhile, spending on colleges and universities has fallen by 11 percent during the same time, and revenue sharing on the state's cities has fallen by 16 percent.

Governor Jennifer Granholm is planning to ask the Legislature to boost funding for universities and community colleges by 2 percent in her 2006-07 budget presentation on Thursday (see related story).

And while not indicating he would oppose Ms. Granholm's proposal to create a health insurance proposal, he did say it came at a time when the state had to stop boosting spending on community health programs.

"We cannot continue divesting from our future," Mr. Sikkema said in a press release. "We need to think about how to get off this path because it is not healthy for the state's future."

Mr. Sikkema said health programs are "insatiable" and "gobbling up funding at the expense of everything else. The reality is that we need to deal with this right now."

Greg Bird, spokesperson for the State Budget Office, said the administration is also worried about Medicaid expenses, and over the past nine years has found ways to save some \$2 billion in overall costs.

Saving more money may mean dropping people from the program, which would in fact cost individuals more through hidden health care and insurance costs, Mr. Bird said.

REPORT NO. --, VOLUME 35
Michigan Report

February 7, 2006

SENATE JUDICIARY REPORTS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BILLS

Bills that would make it a crime to maliciously prevent someone from using a communication device passed the Senate Judiciary Committee on Tuesday, a law that supporters said would be an important tool in prosecuting domestic violence cases where abusers isolate their victims by cutting off their contact or interfere with their attempts to call for help.

SB 1024 and HB 5043 would amend the current law, which only applies to telegraph and land line communications to account for the massive rise in cell phone users by making it criminal to interrupt transmission from any communication device.

Ingham County Chief Assistant Prosecutor Linda Maloney testified that criminalizing the act of snatching a cell phone from someone trying to get help or cutting off a person's access to the outside world by blocking communication will add to the arsenal prosecutors have available in prosecuting domestic violence cases.

"Domestic violence cases are by far the most prevalent violent crime we deal with in my county and in Michigan," she said. "In many cases, telephone obstruction by the offender is the one thing preventing the victim from getting help."

Ms. Maloney said that some judges already interpret the current law to include cell phones but that she doesn't want to see prosecution of the crime left up to judicial interpretation, which could mean an abuser gets off easy because of a loophole in the law.

The bill does not apply to those who own the communication device and refuse to lend it to someone, unless that person needs to report an injury, crime or domestic violence.

Sentencing guidelines, which are described in HB 5044, was also reported out, all bills on a 6-0 vote.

Women at assault center treated to day of pampering

Wednesday, February 08, 2006

schourey@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8575

Women receiving services at the YWCA Women's Shelter enjoyed a welcome day of pampering Tuesday when Studio 24 SalonSpa in Portage treated them to a variety of free services and edible treats and gave them their pick from 12 racks of donated clothes.

The idea for the event came from cosmetologist Angi Mikolajczyk, 29, who said she had once been in an abusive relationship and has since been sensitive to the plight of abused women. Mikolajczyk was one of about 20 staff members who donated their time and expertise for the event.

One woman, who was having calluses on her feet filed smooth, said she was not ashamed of her life and said she's learning to stand up for herself.

"I am not a dog. I am not an animal to be used and abused," she said. "People ask, 'Why did this happen to you?' Well, God has a reason for everything."

She had a job interview scheduled later in the day and said she was grateful for the outfits from the salon's clothing drive.

"It's clothes I can wear to a job, if I get it," she said, adding, "Might find a husband, too."

The day included free services, such as facials, manicures, massages and a variety of hair treatments.

Lunch was catered by the Outback Steakhouse. Coffee, bagels and about 12 racks of clothing were donated by the salon's clientele.

Another woman who was getting blond streaks in her hair, has five children she is raising with occasional help from two relatives. She said she couldn't remember the last time she had her hair cut by a professional. She said she always cuts her hair herself.

"You see everyone else walking around with cute haircuts, and you're like, 'Well, dang, my daughter needs shoes,'" she said, adding that she cleans machinery at a steel company for less than \$300 a week.

"I'm not getting a manicure because there's no point," with a job like that, she said. She said she is concerned about her children's performance in school, something she says is hard to monitor when she comes home from work hours after her children.

Women were given a list of eight services they could choose from, but staff said several women only chose one. The most popular treatment? Pedicures.

"It's the ultimate in making a woman feel wonderful," salon owner Kathy Brown said. "We all stand on our feet all day, and it's hard."

State subsidy to Wal-Mart employees put at \$12 million

By Ralph Thomas
Seattle Times Olympia bureau

February 8, 2006

OLYMPIA — It cost the state an estimated \$12 million in 2004 to provide government-subsidized health care to Wal-Mart employees, according to a state Senate analysis released Tuesday.

The total was nearly double that amount if costs to federal taxpayers are included.

The new figures provide fresh ammunition for a labor-dominated coalition that is pushing for legislation that would force some big employers to spend more on health-care benefits and stop shifting those costs to the state.

"The numbers tell us why it's imperative that we act now," said Sen. Jeanne Kohl-Welles, D-Seattle, chairwoman of the Senate Labor, Commerce and Research and Development Committee.

Jennifer Holder, a regional spokeswoman for Wal-Mart, said the figures used in the analysis are outdated and probably flawed. She said the company has "significantly" improved its health plans since 2004.

"Taking this report and kowtowing to the unions is doing no one any good," Holder said.

The new analysis, prepared by Senate committee staff, is based on data from two confidential state reports that listed the top 20 companies that had the most employees receiving state-subsidized health coverage through Medicaid or the state's Basic Health Plan (BHP).

Wal-Mart came out on top of both lists, with 3,180 employees receiving Medicaid benefits for themselves or a family member and 456 more on the BHP. The company employs about 16,000 people in Washington.

Medicaid is a state-federal program that provides health coverage to families on welfare and children in low-income families. The Basic Health Plan, funded entirely by the state, mostly covers low-income adults.

Using average monthly costs for the two programs, the committee staff estimated the state spent about \$11 million to cover Wal-Mart employees who received Medicaid benefits in 2004 and \$1 million more for those on the BHP.

"We're talking about an \$11 million subsidy to the most profitable corporation in the country," said House Labor and Commerce Committee Chairman Steve Conway, D-Tacoma.

Democrats in the House and Senate are pushing legislation that would require companies with 5,000 or more employees to put at least 9 percent of their payroll costs toward health-care benefits.

A coalition of labor unions and health-care groups is pushing similar measures in more than two dozen states. So far, Maryland is the only place where they have succeeded in getting a bill approved. That law is being challenged in court.

The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, which represents workers for most of Wal-Mart's biggest competitors, last week launched a \$100,000 television ad campaign urging lawmakers to pass the legislation.

The new Senate analysis focused on four of the 20 companies listed in the confidential reports: Wal-Mart, Safeway, Fred Meyer and Target. The committee staff said the four likely would be affected by the Democrats' proposed legislation.

Safeway has roughly the same number of employees in Washington state as Wal-Mart, but in 2004 had less than half as many workers on state-subsidized health care. Its employees received nearly \$6 million in state-subsidized health coverage, according to the analysis.

Fred Meyer employees received an estimated \$3.6 million in state-subsidized health care, while Target workers received nearly \$2.9 million.

Lawmakers said the true costs to taxpayers were probably much higher. They pointed out the analysis does not factor in the additional expense of providing Medicaid coverage to the employees' children.

And it is clear that companies like Wal-Mart make up only a fraction of the total cost to the state of providing health coverage to private employees.

Applying the same monthly averages used in the Senate analysis to all of the companies named in last month's confidential reports, the total cost to state taxpayers comes to nearly \$77 million. Holder said Wal-Mart has made repeated efforts to get more information from the state about the numbers behind the recent reports.

For instance, she said, Wal-Mart employs numerous people who get government-subsidized health coverage because they have a disability or are on the state's WorkFirst program for people working their way off welfare. She said it's unclear whether those employees are included in the reports.

"We've gotten zero answers on anything," Holder said. "It's very frustrating for us."

Ralph Thomas: 360-943-9882 or rthomas@seattletimes.com

Copyright © 2006 The Seattle Times Company

Feb 7, 11:15 PM EST

Thousands of Katrina Victims Evicted

By RUKMINI CALLIMACHI
Associated Press Writer

NEW ORLEANS (AP) -- Hauling everything he owned in a plastic garbage bag, Darryl Travis walked out of the chandeliered lobby of the Crowne Plaza, joining the exodus of Hurricane Katrina refugees evicted from their hotel rooms across the country Tuesday.

The occupants of more than 4,500 government-paid hotel rooms were ordered to turn in their keys Tuesday, as the Federal Emergency Management Agency began cutting off money to pay for their stays.

Far more people - the occupants of at least 20,000 hotel rooms, many of which housed entire families - were given extensions by FEMA until at least next week and possibly until March 1, said FEMA spokesman Butch Kinerney.

FEMA said it gave people every possible opportunity to request an extension.

"We've bent over backward to reach out. We've gone door-to-door to all of the 25,000 hotel rooms no fewer than six times. And there are individuals who have refused to come to the door, refused to answer. There are people who have run when they saw us coming - those are the ones that are now moving on," Kinerney said.

FEMA maintains that as many as 80 percent of those being forced to check out this week have made other living arrangements, ranging from trailers to receiving federal rent assistance to living with relatives.

While many of the evacuees leaving the Crowne Plaza said they had found other housing, several said they were now homeless.

Travis, 24, and his five childhood friends - all in their 20s - had been living on the floor of another evacuee's hotel room, never having registered.

"All I got is a couple pairs of pants and some shirts. The pressure is on," said Jonathan Gautier, 26, one of the six, who was also carrying a single plastic bag filled with clothes.

Wheeling out her boxes of belongings, 20-year-old Katie Kinkella and sister, Jennifer, were heading back to their ruined house in heavily flooded St. Bernard Parish. The sisters had stayed first at the Marriott, and later at the Crowne Plaza as they waited for FEMA to deliver a trailer. Then they waited for FEMA to hook up the electricity at the trailer.

"They just connected it yesterday," Kinkella said as she loaded bags, boxes and suitcases into the back of a pickup on the curb outside the hotel.

In Houston, where 4,000 evacuees were staying in hotels, around 80 percent had received permission to extend their stays until at least Monday. The remaining 20 percent either failed to contact FEMA or made other housing arrangements, said Frank Michel, a spokesman for Mayor Bill White.

"People need to begin to take responsibility for themselves," Michel said.

In New York, around 50 protesters including both evacuees and activists gathered at the steps of City Hall to protest the evictions.

In Oakland, Calif., demonstrators carrying signs and chanting "Evict FEMA" tried to present an eviction notice to employees at a FEMA branch office.

When the more than 50 protesters were turned away, they posted large eviction signs in the front and back of the building. The demonstrators left the property when threatened with arrest. Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco complained that FEMA was pulling the plug on the hotel program before securing other housing.

Outside the Crowne Plaza, protesters held up signs that said: "No trailers. No eviction." Brittany Brown, 21, wept as she explained that although she had been given an extension, eviction was now looming next week. She applied for a trailer in October and, although she keeps calling, her trailer has yet to show up.

© 2006 The Associated Press.

Lansing State Journal

February 8, 2006

Letters to the editor

Refugees add value

As someone who works closely with refugee families, I'm deeply saddened by the negative letters recently printed in the LSJ claiming refugees drain Michigan's system.

Refugees and immigrants add much to Michigan. They work hard and pay taxes just like the rest of us. It's true that many refugees receive food stamps and state-supported health care; it's also true that they give back to our community in many ways.

Refugees I work with have volunteered in local schools and at soup kitchens for the homeless; they helped organize church-run charities and raised funds for community organizations like the Crop Walk; they have worked closely with area police to make our streets safer. One refugee woman I know regularly checks on and cares for her elderly American neighbor.

I wonder if Sandra Harris (Letters, Jan. 29) and other critics who suggest we should "stop accepting people" have done as much?

Kristen H. Perry
Lansing

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 7, 2006

Granholt, 33 Other Governors Ask Congress to Do Its Part to Keep Americans Warm This Winter

LANSING – To help ensure Michigan's most vulnerable residents are not overwhelmed by the sharp rise in home heating costs this winter, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm yesterday led a bipartisan group of governors asking Congress to provide immediate additional funding to keep Americans warm this winter.

"Covering dramatic increases in natural gas and heating oil prices is presenting a potential hardship for citizens. ... If Congress does not increase LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) funding in the next few weeks, state programs across the country could run dry, and the number of households unable to meet their basic heating needs could skyrocket," Granholm wrote in a letter to House and Senate appropriation leaders.

The federal Energy Information Administration (EIA) projected winter heating costs increases of up to 77 percent compared to last winter. Last year, Congress and the President approved a LIHEAP funding ceiling of \$5.1 billion as part of its comprehensive Energy Bill. However, only \$2.16 billion was appropriated for FY 2006, an amount that serves only one out of about five eligible families nationwide. Michigan's current annual LIHEAP allotment is approximately \$117 million and serves nearly 1 million residents. "In Michigan, we are taking action to protect our residents, including increasing funding for heating assistance," Granholm said. "Washington needs to do its part and support states' efforts to provide heating assistance as higher prices make staying warm this winter less affordable for every family."

The governors, led by Granholm and Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney (R-MA), are urging federal lawmakers to immediately pass \$2 billion in immediate additional LIHEAP assistance to significantly boost regular heating assistance for 2006. Last September, Granholm and 27 other governors sent a similar letter to lawmakers requesting an additional \$1.276 billion in emergency LIHEAP funds.

Welfare rolls

Education vital to move many on dole into jobs

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, February 08, 2006

Growing welfare rolls in Genesee County do not give a full understanding of the economy. For while the number getting Medicaid, food stamps or other aid went up by about 6,000 in 2005, the total of county residents holding jobs rose by about 7,000, too, and the unemployment rate declined from 9.2 percent to 7 percent between January and December.

Explaining precisely such seemingly contradictory statistics requires data we don't have. But it's reasonable to assume that some people finding work still qualify for state welfare programs like Medicaid, because their jobs lack health benefits. Additionally, more have joined the aid rolls because the state Department of Human Services reached out to those who qualified but weren't signed up.

What we also know is that people with requisite skills and education stand a good chance of staying employed even in Michigan's soft economy, whereas those with neither often struggle without available work close by. Only 28 percent of adults on welfare in the county held jobs as of last November, but up to 70 percent on assistance were considered physically able to work. However, it's unrealistic for many in these circumstances to go where some of the better job opportunities are, such as in Oakland or Livingston counties. And even a nearby opening means nothing to someone without suitable training.

So, while more local jobs surely would cut the county's welfare numbers, educating aid recipients without marketable skills could do more.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 7, 2006

Governor Makes Designation, Appointments

LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today announced the following designation to the Qualifications Advisory Committee and appointments to the Commission of Agriculture, Board of Social Work, Construction Safety Standards Commission, and Board of Real Estate Appraisers:

Michigan Board of Social Work

Allen L. Cushingberry, Psy.D. of Detroit, CEO and executive director of Amir & Associates. Dr. Cushingberry is appointed to represent individuals engaged in the practice of social work for a term expiring December 31, 2009. He succeeds Mary O'Connor whose term has expired.

Alan T. Semonian of Southfield, certified public accountant and president/founder of Ameritax Plus. Mr. Semonian is appointed to represent the general public for a term expiring December 31, 2009. He succeeds Eleanor Blum whose term has expired. The Michigan Board of Social Work is responsible for the certification and registration of persons engaged in the social work profession.

These appointments are subject to Article V, Section 6 of the Michigan State Constitution of 1963. They stand confirmed unless disapproved by the Senate within 60 days.

Faith, family & community guiding influences

BY ESTELLE SLOOTMAKER
PRESS ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

Kimberly Coleman has served throughout Michigan as a social worker in Saginaw, as executive director of the Single Parent Family Institute and Downtown Branch YMCA in Lansing, and as a corporate training manager in East Lansing.

"In Lansing I developed professional relationships that provided educational and leadership services to the community," Coleman says. "That's really what the Bar Association is about: improving relationships and providing education and community leadership."



PHOTO/DEB KIK

She credits her success to three guiding influences: faith, family and community.

"I am fairly grounded spiritually and have had the kind of family influence that shapes a character that accomplishes dreams," Coleman says. "Now, I am fortunate to have this opportunity extended by the legal community to share what I've acquired."

Giving back to community has been a large part of Coleman's life, and children are a focus of much of her service work. "They are children today, but our future tomorrow," she says.

Coleman feels it is important that all Americans, young, old, black and white, pay attention to the issues brought up during

KIMBERLY COLEMAN knows that black history is partly the story of dreams that can be accomplished, a lesson she strives to impart to children.

**"Black history has relevance every month of the year."
Kimberly Coleman**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GRAND RAPIDS BAR ASSOC.

Black History month.

"Black history has relevance every month of the year. In some places, that's not recognized. Until that gap is closed, there's got to be other avenues to impart that information," she says. "Race does have a significant role in American history. It's unfortunate that this is a neglected chapter in our history. It almost implies it is irrelevant. Black history is relevant to those people who are willing to embrace difference."

In writing her own chapter of that history, Coleman draws on experiences from her childhood. Her great-grandmother, a former teacher, was blind. Coleman once asked her about her dreams. Was she able to see in those dreams the face of her great-granddaughter? No, was the answer. "You have to have the exposure in order to dream," she replied.

"In order to dream, you've got to have exposures," Coleman says. "So parents, create many exposures for your kids. And, kids, never stop dreaming." ●